

# “Military-Political” Relations: The Need for Officer Education

By DEREK S. REVERON *and*  
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*The Provincial Reconstruction Team experience in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrates that, where inadequate civilian capacity to deploy for post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction operations exists, military and Department of Defense civilian personnel will be employed to carry out stability operations, regardless of whether they possess the requisite skills, technical expertise, or training.<sup>1</sup>*

Iraqi contractors review displays and sign up for projects at Ramadi Reconstruction Conference



U.S. Marine Corps (Andrew D. Pendrack)

To underscore the diversity of missions now being carried out by the U.S. military, consider the following examples. First Marine Expeditionary Force sent 15 Marines to Foreign Service Institute courses and conducted 2-day “economic reconstruction roundtables.” Third Brigade Combat Team, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division Soldiers have been conducting a comprehensive assessment to revitalize Iraq’s aquaculture industry. The Navy’s amphibious dock landing ship, the USS *Fort McHenry*, hosted nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) on board to facilitate fisheries conservation. And Army and Marine Corps commanders are serving as de facto town mayors. While Civil Affairs units have always conducted such missions, in the current environment they are no longer alone.

Today, all Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen participate in what was formerly the domain of the specialist. As the House Armed Services Committee notes in the epigraph above, where inadequate civilian capacity exists (in and out of combat zones), military personnel will be employed whether they are prepared or not.<sup>2</sup> While deploying units continue to give their personnel the basic technical skills to excel, there is a definite lack of preparation and expertise within the officer corps to serve in such widely varying stability operations capacities as de facto town mayors, coordinators of economic development, builders of judicial and law enforcement institutions, and promoters of social harmony.

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE <b>2009</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2009 to 00-00-2009</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>'Military-Political' Relations: The Need for Officer Education</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 260 Fifth Avenue SW Bg 64 Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>6</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

Yet Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 3000.05, "Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction Operations" (November 2005), requires the U.S. military to move beyond just fighting and winning the Nation's wars to the equally important military mission of supporting efforts to stabilize areas and rebuild institutions in order to develop a lasting peace. While there is no quick solution to provide military officers with the diverse skills necessary for conducting these stability operations, the realities of future nonwarfighting missions require professional military education (PME) institutions to create officers able to excel in military-political environments around the world. This goes beyond teaching about the interagency process and knowing what other U.S. Government institutions bring to the table. Rather, this requires military officers to embrace their expanded roles in the geopolitical space as they increasingly serve as important political actors, fulfilling development, diplomatic, and educational roles.

### Expanding PME

It seems self-evident that this field of "military-political relations" is bound to expand, abetted by an ever-increasing role for the U.S. military in the foreign policy realm. The latter

fact was highlighted by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who predicted that asymmetric warfare would predominate in the near future, pointing out that "these conflicts will be fundamentally political in nature, and require the application of all elements of national power. Success will be less a matter of imposing one's will and more a function of shaping behavior—of friends, adversaries, and most importantly, the people in between." The Secretary went on to state that "how well we enable and empower our partners to defend and govern themselves" is perhaps "the most important military component in the War on Terror."<sup>3</sup>

Secretary Gates' view underscores our contention that U.S. military officers require an expanded understanding of, and education on, military-political relations—defined generally as the relationship between the military and U.S. foreign policy. Field-grade officers in particular need to be better educated on how best to shape the security environment, whether they are operating at the global national level or within a geographic combatant commander's area of responsibility. PME institutions should devote sustained attention to developing officers' breadth and depth in this military-political relations arena.

Some 10 years ago, contributors to *Joint Force Quarterly* were advocating for PME

institutions to help produce officers who were more innovative critical thinkers and leaders, able to respond to the complex challenges of a dangerous future.<sup>4</sup> We still need that type of thinker and leader, but today we also need to provide them with more nuanced habits of thought to deal with the political-military, socioeconomic, and complex cultural and regional issues that concern the United States.

Unfortunately, without a mandate to consider this essential area, military-political relations may well be slighted because of the continuous need to stretch curricula at the PME schools to accommodate all the subjects considered necessary for today's professional officer.

*field-grade officers need to be better educated on how best to shape the security environment*

Additionally, the tendency for officers to dismiss the military's role in nonwarfighting missions as a function for the "interagency" community—that is, not the military, but the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), or another Federal agency—further complicates any attempts to prepare the military better for its broader roles in promoting security. Yet while the State Department is America's lead foreign policy organization, in reality U.S. military commanders are as much policy entrepreneurs as they are warfighters, and they increasingly fulfill important diplomatic roles. In fact, DOD has a distinct advantage over the State Department in both size and resources, with its operating budget many times greater than State's. U.S. military commands, with their forward presence, large planning staffs, and various engagement tools, are well equipped for those roles and increasingly welcome them.<sup>5</sup> Today, these commands routinely pursue regional level engagement by playing host to international security conferences, promoting military-to-military contacts, and providing American military presence, training, and equipment to improve regional security.

Still, involvement in foreign affairs has been criticized for being in tension with the military's warfighting ethos. Some analysts also wonder whether officers can reasonably be expected to acquire the linguistic skills, political acumen, and cultural knowledge to operate effectively as surrogate diplomats, and whether having officers in such roles tends to

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Joint Contracting Command–Iraq/Afghanistan commander speaks with Iraqi women about their role in business world



U.S. Marine Corps (Jeremy M. Giacomino)



cast international affairs as military problems. Yet military forces have always had important roles other than fighting wars, and the gap between senior military officers and senior diplomats is not that wide. What is changing is that these roles and responsibilities are becoming permanent fixtures at the tactical and operational levels of war, demanding new habits of thinking from younger officers.

## How We Got Here

Since multilateral military operations are the norm today (at least 35 countries are militarily active in Afghanistan), U.S. forces clearly need regular interactions with their international partners. Those activities make up what has come to be known as *Phase Zero operations* and are the softer side of military power. Through global military engagement, these activities build trust and cooperation between the United States and key foreign elites. This is no longer the exclusive operating area for diplomats; it is also a challenge to midgrade officers to move beyond their warfighting proficiencies. Thus, we believe that it is important to recognize this reality and actively teach our officers the necessary military-political competencies to excel in this environment, especially as this phenomenon of increased military activities dates back at least 15 years.

To substantiate the need to educate officers in this area, and to flesh out what specific competencies should be considered to accomplish that education, it is worth exploring how the U.S. military got to the point of being so heavily involved in the foreign policy arena. Contrary to what one might suppose, contemporary involvement actually has its roots prior to September 11, 2001, in the 1990s. President Bill Clinton's 1996 *National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* directed the military to engage with international partners and to provide a credible overseas presence.<sup>6</sup> Being forward deployed during the Cold War had taught Washington that by providing for other countries' security, the United States could advance its trade agenda, and countries protected by American security guarantees could focus on their own political and economic development.

Taking its cue from the 1996 strategy, the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review posited a new foundation of "shape-respond-prepare," which not only emphasized the capability to fight and win wars but also placed "greater emphasis on the continuing need to maintain continuous overseas presence in order to

shape the international environment."<sup>7</sup> A major goal of engagement or shaping was to reduce the engines of conflict. In addition, the U.S. military's experiences in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s forced it to recognize that it is far more effective in preventing state failure than in responding to its aftermath.<sup>8</sup> Yet to date, civilian leaders have not been able to resist calls for U.S. intervention—even after state failure—and the U.S. military has been involved in these operations, albeit reluctantly.

At the same time, the 1990s "shape-respond-prepare" strategy and expansion of

military missions also gave rise to a "superpowers don't do windows" argument, particularly within the military. Defense analysts such as John Hillen identified 1990s diplomatic engagement by the regional commanders—General Wesley Clark, General Anthony Zinni, and General Charles Wilhelm—or state-building missions in Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo, as inappropriate and distracting for an organization that is supposed to fight and win the Nation's wars. Experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan have started to renew this argument, but clearly the U.S. military will be conducting stability and reconstruction operations

*being forward deployed during the Cold War taught Washington that countries protected by American security guarantees could focus on their own political and economic development*

Marine Corps officer discusses operations with Afghan National Army officers



U.S. Marine Corps (Luis P. Valdespino, Jr.)

for the foreseeable future. Other observers have expressed fears of a postmodern imperialism, a failure in civilian control of the military, or a major problem with the interagency process. Since 1989, this line of reasoning goes, the United States has been overly prone to military (humanitarian) intervention while the military should be focused on war proper. Andrew Bacevich, a professor of international relations at Boston University, connected that tendency for the military to do it all with a disturbing trend within American politics that links the military tool and utopian political ends. That,

*as the U.S. military manages the Foreign Military Financing program on a daily basis, politically knowledgeable officers are required to administer it*

in turn, Bacevich argues, leads to an increased propensity to use force.<sup>9</sup> Other critics such as Mitchell Thompson have contended that if only the State Department were on an equal budgetary footing with DOD (thus creating true interagency cooperation), the United States would have a more balanced, less beligerent foreign policy.<sup>10</sup>

Yet in spite of calls for budgetary reform to increase social and economic assistance provided through the State Department, Congress simply finds defense issues more compelling. Politicians have an interest in associating themselves with patriotism and strength, so it is much easier to find advocates for counterterrorism training than for women's empowerment programs. The conventional wisdom on Capitol Hill is that while defense spending is understood by American voters to be a matter of national security, international assistance sounds unnecessary. Thus, while some members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee would like to place all security assistance under the authority of the Secretary of State, or even break up the current military command structure, such efforts have failed. It is important for our field-grade officers to understand the pros and cons of these types of arguments—and the politics involved—as they will inevitably be affected by them as they take on higher level positions, no matter what administration is in power.

This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that, despite its early impulses against inter-

vention, the George W. Bush administration found it necessary to embrace state-building, too. President Bush could not escape from the reality that there is a global demand for U.S. engagement programs and that the military is most readily available to do the engaging. By strengthening foreign militaries, states become less vulnerable to transnational crime or state failure and can respond to natural or manmade disasters. By increasing the capacity of foreign military forces that can respond to their internal problems, the U.S. military can reduce its own commitment to conflict zones. Secretary Gates underscored this reality when he recently declared that “from the standpoint

states “at risk.” Security assistance is meant to help fledgling democracies consolidate, fragile states avoid failure, and authoritarian states liberalize, which recent studies credit with some success.<sup>12</sup> It also fulfills important training, basing, and operational requirements for American forces stationed in some 40 countries. Those U.S. forces help build partners' security capabilities, influence potential adversaries, mitigate the underlying causes of conflict, and enable rapid action when military intervention is required.

Equally important to building partners' security capabilities is the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program. Through this



U.S. Air Force (Joshua T. Jasper)

**Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team members and local officials discuss electricity output from dam**

of America's national security, the most important assignment in your military career may not necessarily be commanding U.S. soldiers, but advising or mentoring the troops of other nations as they battle the forces of terror and instability within their own borders.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, “graduates” of U.S. security assistance programs can be found alongside American forces in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Balkans.

In Afghanistan, for instance, U.S. troops make up only about 50 percent of the force; in the Balkans, U.S. forces have always been a minority. Indeed, the current focus on transnational threats has been an additional impetus for building such partnerships. For example, the United States largely trained and supported African Union forces in Darfur, Sudan. This represents just one instance of continuing U.S. interest in promoting security assistance for

program, partners receive grants and loans to purchase American military equipment. As the U.S. military manages the FMF program on a daily basis, politically knowledgeable officers are required to administer it. To ensure the U.S. military does not arm regimes completely divorced from U.S. foreign policy, the State Department provides oversight. Last year, the FMF budget was the largest program in the State Department's international assistance account, consuming more than \$4.5 billion, which is 50 percent more than the Economic Support Fund and 60 percent more than the global HIV/AIDS initiative.<sup>13</sup> Yet in April 2008, Secretary Gates asked Congress to give DOD permanent authority, as the lead agency, for the Global Train and Equip program, which trains and equips foreign militaries on a rapid assistance basis. In fact, DOD asked Congress



to raise the program's annual budget to \$750 million, representing a 250 percent increase.<sup>14</sup> Regardless of who actually owns or manages the program, it is important for military officers to understand the bigger foreign policy picture and how security assistance programs fit into the U.S. policy context.

With control over so many resources, it should not be surprising that some critics worry that the United States has inadvertently created a new class of overly powerful and independent military officials—particularly the geographic combatant commanders—along the lines of the proconsuls of ancient Rome or the viceroys of British India.<sup>15</sup> We find it difficult to take such concerns too seriously, though a case can certainly be made for strengthening the civilian presence in foreign policy, including related matters that fall within the geographic combatant commander's area of concern.<sup>16</sup> Yet while there are inevitable frictions, generally American Ambassadors and military commanders understand that they need each other's cooperation. Coercive diplomacy works only if there is military force behind it; military engagement works only if it supports larger national security objectives. In essence, then, these are interagency activities, but they are different from what midlevel officers have experienced or learned about to date. In fact, these types of activities turn the normal supported/supporting agencies relationship on its head for field-grade officers, as even fairly junior grade officers have routinely found themselves serving as de facto mayors, police chiefs, and economic advisors in Iraq and Afghanistan. This again requires that we provide officers with the necessary military-political competencies to succeed.

Clearly, the new U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) will test the effective use of military-political competencies even further. The already existing Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa can serve as a model to illustrate how Civil Affairs activities can fulfill the commander's intent to achieve military objectives. It is also useful to recall that this focus on other than combat/conventional skills is not new to U.S. officers who have served tours in U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM). For many years, USSOUTHCOM has demonstrated the necessity and utility of U.S. military officers serving to further foreign policy goals in the nontraditional areas of countering narcotrafficking, providing humanitarian relief and disaster assistance, and serving as

role models for advancing human rights and civil-military relations in the region. The changing military roles required to serve U.S. foreign policy goals in USAFRICOM underscore the fact that the longstanding operations in USSOUTHCOM represent more and more the rule rather than the exception. As USSOUTHCOM commander Admiral James Stavridis noted in a recent interview, the “most significant change to our organization is a change in our cultural mindset. . . . This new thinking will take us from a culture of war to a culture of war and peace, from a culture of moving people and materiel to one of moving ideas.”<sup>17</sup>

While Secretary Gates has made it clear that the State Department needs to play the lead role in overseeing U.S. foreign policy—including his strong support for a funding increase for the State Department<sup>18</sup> to do more of this “nonmilitary” work—clearly the military will continue to play an outsized role in the stability operations, asymmetric warfare context. This is impossible to avoid considering the size, resources, and capabilities of the U.S. military. Yet to do this effectively, as Secretary Gates argues, we need “new institutions . . . for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, new organizations with a 21<sup>st</sup> century mind-set.”<sup>19</sup> At the same time we need to focus on what the Secretary terms “the civilian instruments of national security—diplomacy, strategic communications, foreign assistance, civic action, and economic reconstruction and development.”<sup>20</sup>

### How to Proceed

We contend that in order to prepare U.S. military officers appropriately to carry out these civilian instruments of national security with their counterparts, our officers need relevant education, which can be done most effectively at PME institutions. As one example, consider the following curriculum that we believe encompasses the type of considerations necessary for the intermediate level of officer PME.

At the Naval War College, the National Security Decision Making Department has specifically structured its intermediate course around combatant commands so students can understand the military's nonwarfighting roles and their dynamics. Student seminars are designated as one of five geographic combatant commands (U.S. Northern Command is excluded to emphasize regional studies outside of North America) and are immersed in the political-military, socioeconomic, and security challenges of the corresponding area of respon-

sibility. At the same time, students are taught organizational dynamics, interagency competencies, and interpersonal skills and engage in a 3-week project to assess the region's security environment, develop a theater strategy, outline an implementation and assurance plan, and develop necessary capabilities to execute the engagement strategy over an 8-year period. This exercise places a seminar of 15 students in the shoes of a combatant command's senior staff to understand how the military contributes to U.S. foreign policy outside of fighting wars. It challenges students to understand how military activities fit within the activities of the State

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Department, USAID, and other U.S. Government agencies. While some officers initially resist the nonwarfighting roles combatant commands undertake, by the course's end they fully understand the importance of the engagement mission. Furthermore, they have a better understanding of the overlapping nature of defense, development, and diplomacy, which they use to design security cooperation activities.

To ensure that this type of broadening education takes place at all PME institutions at appropriate levels, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff must include military-political relations competencies as part of the requirements established under an updated Officer Professional Military Education Policy (OPMEP). It is critical that this becomes part of the OPMEP, and thus mandated through PME, in order to carry out the Chairman's stated “PME vision [that] entails ensuring that officers are properly prepared for their leadership roles at every level of activity and employment, and through this, ensure that the . . . Armed Forces remain capable of defeating today's threat and tomorrow's.”<sup>21</sup> A wider understanding of the military role in foreign policy is an absolute necessity not only for defeating threats, but also for ameliorating the conditions that help engender them. The 2008 National Defense Strategy notes that the military “will help build the internal capacities of countries at risk. We will work with and through like-



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#### Lessons of Abu Ghraib: Understanding and Preventing Prisoner Abuse in Military Operations

The abuse of prisoners by U.S. Soldiers at Abu Ghraib had broad strategic consequences, leading many around the world to question the legitimacy of U.S. goals and activities in Iraq. In this paper, Paul Bartone draws on extensive unclassified reports from multiple investigations of the abuses, and applies psychological and social-situational perspectives to develop a better grasp of the causative factors. He finds that most young adults are powerfully inclined to behave in accord with the social conventions and pressures around them. Thus the lessons for military leaders at all levels and especially in ambiguous circumstances: ensure that standards of behavior are clear and explicit throughout all phases of an operation, and personally represent and reinforce those standards.

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## SPECIAL FEATURE | The Need for Officer Education

minded states to help shrink the ungoverned areas of the world.” We propose that the following represents the type of learning area and associated objectives that should be considered for inclusion in the OPMEP. Officers should be able to comprehend and analyze:

- the capabilities and roles that U.S. military forces employ to conduct theater security cooperation activities
- the importance of strategic communication in conducting theater security cooperation activities
- the purpose, roles, functions, and relationships of combatant commanders and joint force commanders with U.S. Ambassadors and their staffs, NGOs, and international partners
- the achievement of unity of effort in the absence of unity of command in the areas of defense, diplomacy, and development
- how the U.S. military is trained to plan, execute, and sustain security cooperation activities.

In sum, much more can and should be done to increase the military-political acumen of military officers and their corresponding capability to operate effectively in today's complex environment. There is no reason to believe that security cooperation and stability and reconstruction operations are likely to end any time soon. Presidents and policymakers, both Democrat and Republican, find an irresistibly ready tool in the military, and many find it convenient to make use of this tool in ways that may ultimately weaken the military. Nevertheless, the U.S. military needs to be prepared to support likely missions for the near term and beyond. The question here is not whether the military should be engaged in nonwarfighting activities, but how to best educate our midlevel officers to interact appropriately with myriad other actors to produce optimal results for U.S. national security. **JFQ**

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, *Agency Stovepipes vs. Strategic Agility: Lessons We Need to Learn from Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq and Afghanistan*, April 2008, 51.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Robert M. Gates, “Beyond Guns and Steel: Reviving the Nonmilitary Instruments of American Power,” *Military Review* (January-February 2008), 6.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Leonard D. Holder, Jr., and William Murray, “Prospects for Military Education,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 18 (Spring 1998), 81–90; and Ervin J. Rokke, “Military Education for the New Age,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 9 (Autumn 1995), 18–23.

<sup>5</sup> While largely directed to Iraq and Afghanistan, the Defense Department accounts for 20 percent of official development assistance. See Stewart Patrick and Kaysie Brown, “The Pentagon and Global Development: Making Sense of the DoD's Expanding Role,” Center for Global Development, Working Paper 131, November 2007.

<sup>6</sup> *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington, DC: The White House, February 1996), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Defense, 1997 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, May 1997), v.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen D. Krasner and Carlos Pascual, “Addressing State Failure,” *Foreign Affairs* (July-August 2005), 153.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell J. Thompson, “Breaking the Proconsulate: A New Design for National Power,” *Parameters* 35, no. 4 (Winter 2005/2006), 62–75.

<sup>11</sup> Robert M. Gates, “Evening Lecture at West Point,” April 21, 2008, accessed at <[www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1232](http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1232)>.

<sup>12</sup> Carol Atkinson, “Constructivist Implications of Material Power: Military Engagement and the Socialization of States, 1972–2000,” *International Studies Quarterly* 50 (2006), 509–537.

<sup>13</sup> Department of State, “Foreign Military Financing Account Tables,” available at <[www.state.gov/s/d/rm/rfs/iab/2007/html/60203.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/rfs/iab/2007/html/60203.htm)>. Military assistance for Iraq and Afghanistan is not included in this account data. Also, of that \$4.5 billion, 80 percent goes to two countries, Israel (\$2.3 billion) and Egypt (\$1.3 billion).

<sup>14</sup> Thom Shanker, “Pentagon Seeks Authority to Train and Equip Foreign Militaries,” *The New York Times*, April 17, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Thompson, 63.

<sup>16</sup> We take more seriously concerns that conducting humanitarian assistance operations can undermine the military's warfighting orientation or inadvertently arm repressive regimes or future adversaries. See Bacevich, 3.

<sup>17</sup> “An Interview with Admiral James G. Stavridis,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 50 (3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter, 2008), 128.

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas Kralej, “Gates Seen Reversing Rivalry with State,” *The Washington Times*, April 17, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Gates, “Beyond Guns,” 7.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>21</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Officer Professional Military Education Policy, CJCS Instruction 1800.01C, December 22, 2005, 1. Until the OPMEP is updated, we urge that the competencies considered here be included as one of the annually updated “Special Areas of Emphasis.”